



AUTHOR'S NOTES

By Kait Kerrigan

Tell us about your inspirations.

Brian likes to say that *The Unauthorized Autobiography of Samantha Brown* is a cross between *The Fantasticks* and *High School Musical* and I think that's pretty accurate, but I'll throw in a couple more heady influences. Works that have influenced us on this particular project (to name just a few) include *On the Road* by Jack Kerouac, *Special Topics in Calamity Physics* by Marisha Pessl, *The Dead* by James Joyce and a whole slew of other Modernist novels that celebrate the elevation of small piercing life-changing moments, *Our Town* by Thornton Wilder, *Veronica Mars* by Rob Thomas and others awesome TV writers, and *A Year in Magical Thinking* by Joan Didion. Our musical influences are an unholy mix of the Indigo Girls, Meatloaf, all of our musical theater heroes, and recently our singer-songwriter friends.

Talk a bit about the collaboration and how the show came about.

The germ for *The Unauthorized Autobiography of Samantha Brown* came when Brian was a freshman in college. He was in his first semester at Harvard and found himself wondering how he got there. A year later, he was sophomore at NYU and had written the first draft of a musical called *The Wheel* about a bright and ambitious girl named Sam who decides not to go to college.

It was around that time that I entered the picture. When Brian moved to New York City, he heard that I was studying at Barnard. We'd known each other through our theater group Young People's Theatre Workshop but we weren't friends. He heard I was writing plays and I'd heard some of his music and liked it. We immediately began writing a show called *The Woman Upstairs*. When we finished our first draft and presented it at the first New York Musical Theatre Festival, we started looking for a new project. Brian asked me to take a look at his first draft of *The Wheel*. I read it and, while I understood why he wanted to write it, I didn't understand what the broader appeal of the show was. We spent the next couple weeks figuring out how Sam Brown could be a more universal character. How was her struggle to come of age not only relevant to someone like Brian who had experienced her plight exactly, but to someone like me for whom going to Barnard was the prize at the end of a long academic and financial struggle?

I don't think we fully achieved that universality until we wrote the last song in the show, several drafts and several years later. I remember sitting in the audience during one of the first performances of "Remember This." I was twenty-eight years old and far away from that first adult decision regarding college. I remember being at yet another crossroad in my personal life - realizing that I could do the easy thing that made sense or the hard one that felt right. I listened to the lyric I'd written and found myself looking for the courage that we'd imbued in this now-universal character.

The Unauthorized Autobiography of Samantha Brown isn't about college. It's about growing up. It's about learning that with the freedom to do anything comes the responsibility to do something. It's about a moment that you experience for the first time when you're eighteen but it's a moment you experience again and again over the course of your life.

What do you hope to accomplish here at Goodspeed?

I had a wonderful conversation with a friend of mine who is an archeologist. He described being on a dig and building a camp fire. As they were digging the campfire hole, far from the dig site, they uncovered an important artifact. Suddenly, looking back at the site, they realized that it was three times the size they originally imagined. When you start writing a musical, it feels a lot like being on an archeological dig. You think you know what you're uncovering but there's a lot of guesswork and sometimes you realize that what you set out to write is actually a lot bigger than you anticipated.

We've been lucky enough to have several developmental steps before we even set foot on Goodspeed soil, so we've figured out the size and shape of our "dig" and now we're dealing with making sure that we have everything polished and ready for the exhibition! We all hope to learn a lot about the physical world of our show and how we can bring out even more theatricality in the piece. We want to do everything we can to support our director Danny Goldstein's vision. All the while, we're keeping our eye on the first ten minutes of the piece, which is always the hardest. We want to make sure that we're really establishing the tone of the show so that the audience's expectations are met and exceeded by the time the lights come up at the end of the show.

What can the audience expect to see?

I think it's fair to say that the audience will be surprised. The show appears to be about something small when it begins but it grows and deepens as Samantha changes over the course of the show. The audiences can also expect some unbelievable performances both from the actors and from the band. We already have relationships with many of the actors and band members, and we count them as some of the best in the business.

